SHRI R. KAMARAJ: My second supplementary is: What steps are being taken to safeguard the gas supply against any unforeseable happenings like fire, etc.?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Question Hour is over.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO STARRED QUESTIONS

Negotiations with Iraq for oil quota

*208. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether government have a proposal to send a team to urge Iraq to raise oil quota;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether imports under 'food for oil' have been dropped; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): (a) and (b) No, sir. However, during the 15th session of the Indian — Iraq Joint Commission for economic and technical cooperation held at Baghdad on 6th and 7th July 2002, the issue of supply of Iraqi crude oil to India was discussed.

(c) and (d) Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) had been sourcing crude oil fron M/s. SOMO, the national oil company of Iraq, under the UN approved "Oil for Food" programme upto December 2000. Recently, IOCL has requested M/s. SOMO to allocate crude oil under the "Oil for Food" programme, covering a period of six months from December 2002 onwards.

Artificial filling up of ground water in Gujarat

*210. DR. A. K. PATEL: Will the Miniser of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of sharp decline/shrinking of ground water table in most of the districts in Gujarat specially North Gujarat and Kutch-Saurashtra Region;

(b) if so, whether Government have launched any comprehensive plan to fill the ground water artificially to avoid servere water crisis in dought prone districts of Gujarat:

(c) if so, the funds earmarked for the implementation of the scheme; and

(d) the funds allocated to Gujarat during the last three years and likely to be released during the current financial year?

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI): (a) to (d) The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), under the Ministry of Water Resources regularly monitors the ground water level of the country, including the State of Gujarat through a network of National Hydrograph Monitoring Stations. Analysis of data collected by the CGWB has indicated fall in the level of ground water in various parts of Gujarat, including those in North Gujarat, Kutch and Saurashtra.

Water being a State subject, action to augment the ground water resources is to be taken by the concerned State Government. However, a Central Sector Scheme on 'Study of Recharge to Ground Water' was implemented in the country during the IX Plan. Under this scheme, the CGWB had approved 3 projects for artificial recharge of ground water and roof top rain water harvesting in the State of Gujarat, at a cost of Rs. 20.05 lakh, in the last three years. The proposal to continue this central Sector Scheme for artificial recharge in the X Plan is at consultation stage. As such, the details of funds likely to be released to the State during the current financial year cannot be given at this stage.

Recommendations of Ashim Dasgupta Committee

*211. PROF. RAM DEO BHANDARY: Will the Minister of FINANCE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a high powered Committee set up by Government under the Chairmanship of Ashim Dasgupta, Finance Minister of West Bengal has listed four core problems being faced by the States as a result of Central politics;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken by Government on each of its recommendations ?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) The Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers headed by Dr. Asim Kumar Dasgupta, Finance Minister, West Bengal have in their Memorandum, listed problems being faced by States. These, *inter-alia*, include (i) adverse impact on the finances of the State Governments of the pay revision in the wake of Vth Central Pay Commission recommendations, (ii) larger interest burden due to States having to pay higher interest rate on central loans, (iii) adverse impact of shortfall in Central devolution to State Governments in 2001-02 and (iv) impact of RBI implementing the Ways & Means and Overdraft limits.